



Expertise that Works

Emergency Call Center Staffing Program Assessment

Frederick County Government

Report #16-09

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I. Executive Summary

Background

SC&H has been engaged by the Frederick County Government (FCG, the County) Interagency Internal Audit Authority (IIAA), to perform a program assessment of the Department of Emergency Communications (DEC) overtime and staffing controls. This report describes the work performed during the second phase of a two part engagement, as well as the resulting observations. Phase I of this engagement focused on information gathering, with the goal of identifying areas of staffing risk associated with the FCG DEC process. The results of Phase I were used to define the objectives of Phase II.

The DEC serves as the PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) and distribution point for all 9-1-1 emergency, non-emergency, and administrative requests in Frederick County. The DEC operates 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The DEC is responsible for the dispatch of fire, rescue/ambulance services, Frederick County Animal Control, State Highway, law enforcement including the Frederick County Sheriff's Office, Brunswick City Police, and the Thurmont Police Department. Additionally, the DEC dispatches Fire and Rescue calls for Fort Detrick, but transfers Police calls to appropriate military authorities.

Emergency 9-1-1 calls are received on a designated 9-1-1 phone line. Non-emergency calls are 10-digit calls that are received from various phone lines. All calls are routed through an Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system via Sentinel Phone System¹. The FCG DEC utilizes the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system to record, document, and facilitate all calls.

As of April 2016, the DEC was comprised of 51 full-time employees, including the Director of DEC, Administrator of Quality Assurance and Training, Administrator of Operations, Administrator of Technology, Administrator Specialist, Managers (4), Supervisors (6), Dispatchers (24), and Call Takers (12). In addition, the DEC has an active staff of 10 part-time employees. Call Takers are responsible for answering and processing emergency, non-emergency, and administrative phone calls; following protocol and entering information within CAD; and dispatching non-emergency agencies (including, but not limited to, Animal Control, Parks and Recreation, and State Highway). Dispatchers communicate with, and address the needs of, on-scene resources for Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) or Police for the duration of the case or emergency.

The DEC shift schedule for Call Takers, Dispatchers, and Supervisors is four consecutive days, which includes two days and two nights (12 hour shifts) on-schedule followed by four days off-schedule. For any given shift at DEC, the required minimum staffing level is eight employees (Call Takers (3), Fire and Rescue Dispatchers (2), Frederick County Dispatchers (2), and a

¹ Sentinel Phone System is a call taking system used by medium to large sized PSAPs with 7 to 20+ positions.

Supervisor). In the event that a scheduled employee is not available for his/her shift and the staffing level falls below eight, a shift Supervisor attempts to request a part-time employee to cover the shift. If a part-time employee is not available, an Administrator or Director must authorize the anticipated overtime expense.

Objectives

The following objectives were established by the IAA based upon the understanding gained during Phase I:

- A. Analyze factors contributing to turnover
- B. Identify success indicators for new hires
- C. Perform a staffing and shift benchmarking exercise for a larger sample size of similar counties
- D. Project staffing needs based on anticipated population growth
- E. Analyze current call center procedures for process improvements
- F. Review job responsibilities, minimum requirements, and structure of fielding calls for enhancement opportunities

Scope

The evaluation process was initiated on May 26, 2016 and completed in August, 2016. The scope of the program assessment included an examination and assessment of current FCG DEC procedures, as well as call data from January 1, 2012 through June 30, 2016.

Methodology and Approach

SC&H met with the Director of Emergency Management and the Director of the DEC at FCG to review key processes, risks, and controls related to staffing. SC&H addressed the objectives of this evaluation through inquiry, observation, inspection, and analysis. Procedures performed included the following:

- Developed and conducted an anonymous survey for all current DEC floor staff and obtained feedback regarding shift preferences, stress levels, and overall job satisfaction
- Reviewed current and past employee human resource files for indicators and trends that may have contributed to employee turnover or success
- Performed a staffing and shift benchmarking exercise by reaching out to a larger sample size (six) of similar counties, receiving three responses. This was accomplished through the following steps:
 - Identified counties of similar size/composition
 - Met with FCG DEC Management to identify additional counties for inquiry
 - Created a series of key indicators and metrics
 - Conducted interviews with three counties

- Performed and analysis to assist Management in projecting Call Taker staffing needs based on anticipated population growth
- Reviewed job responsibilities, minimum requirements, and structure of fielding calls for DEC enhancement opportunities

Summary of Work

After reviewing processes in place and evaluating the current control environment, SC&H concludes that there are several process improvement opportunities available to increase process effectiveness and efficiency, and to assist with overall employee retention.

The following section provides detailed observations and recommendations regarding seven separate topics.

We appreciate the assistance and cooperation of the management and staff of FCG DEC during the performance of the program assessment. Please contact us if you have any questions or comments regarding any of the information contained in the report.

SC&H Group



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Principal

II. Detailed Observations and Recommendations

Observation 1

A survey of DEC floor staff job satisfaction provided insight into the opinions of current employees including culture and morale.

Observation Detail

As a component of this review, SC&H conducted a 36 question survey, designed around Paul E. Spector's² Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), designed to measure and evaluate nine facets of job satisfaction with the goal of assessing and comparing responses to related industry norms³. These norms represent the aggregated responses of companies and professionals who have used the survey and have reported the results for public use and comparison. To provide a variety of relevant comparisons, SC&H analyzed the DEC's responses as compared to four sectors. The four sectors selected for comparison to the DEC are public, non-profit, police, and an all sector average. Responses were requested of DEC floor staff including Emergency Communications Specialists (ECS) I, ECS II, ECS III, ECS IV, ECS Part-Time, and ECS Managers. At the time of the survey, the employee breakdown was 50 floor staff and 15 part-time employees. The survey was sent to 65 DEC employees and resulted in an 80% response rate. For additional information regarding the survey procedures and greater detail of responses, see Appendix A.

While the survey's results did not exclusively identify topics indicating areas for improvement, this observation is focused on providing insight into the areas of concern that the County can consider addressing. As a result, the below points were noted:

- The two facets with the highest average level of dissatisfaction by DEC employees are Contingent Rewards (52%) and Communication (45%) (**See Table 15 in Appendix A**). Contingent rewards can be defined as performance based rewards that provide the feeling of appreciation or recognition for a job performed well. For purposes of this survey, communication refers to internal communication within an organization both top-down and peer based.
- Opinions within the DEC are divided in the satisfaction levels for the following facets: Contingent Rewards, Co-workers, and Communication. The Co-workers facet captures the satisfaction level for the competency, respect, and harmony between peers. (**See Appendix A, Tables 11-14**). While the mean score for each of these facets appears to be in line with industry norms, the high standard deviation indicates varying opinions of these facets within the workforce. Standard deviation is a statistical measure used to indicate what is, on average the distance of a score from the mean. This means that

² Paul E. Spector, Credentials: <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/author/paul-e-spector>

³ Paul E. Spector, Job Satisfaction Survey Overview: <http://shell.cas.usf.edu/~pspector/scales/jssovr.html>

while some responded positively, the DEC has a large portion of employees who do not have a favorable view of these facets.

- Written feedback obtained from DEC employees who participated in the survey expressed the following concerns that appear to be linked to culture and morale:
 - Favoritism in promotion and training opportunities
 - Inconsistent discipline practices and management expectations
 - Unsupportive environment
 - Inability to communicate concerns and opinions to management
 - Low workforce diversity

Risk

Challenges related to organization culture and morale may result in reduced productivity, performance, and public safety. These challenges may also result in the potential for increased turnover.

Recommendation 1.1

FCG DEC Management should consider undergoing a formal cultural assessment⁴. The goal of this assessment should be to comprehensively capture the current state of the culture at the DEC and develop subsequent action items through the use of best practice solutions to reduce turnover and improve morale. While the results of the survey performed by SC&H indicate perceived problems with the organizational culture of DEC, this engagement was not a cultural assessment and does not definitively identify the root causes driving the employee responses.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

DEC Management is not considering undergoing a formal cultural assessment at this time. Currently the cost of an assessment is not included in the divisional budget and the management resources needed to conduct such an assessment are not available. In the next two fiscal years DEC will evaluate the need and cost of such an assessment as resources become more available.

Recommendation 1.2

FCG DEC Management should consider working with FCG HR to internally conduct 360 evaluations. 360 evaluations target management level personnel and are completed by all employees (colleagues, subordinates, superiors, and self). 360 evaluations focus on management related soft skills. This may provide DEC leadership with potential areas of improvement and justification for further leadership development.

⁴ A culture assessment is the act of gaining a complete understanding of the current state and climate of an organizations culture.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

DEC Management will investigate/consider through FCG HR the possibility of conducting 360 evaluations. 360 programs allow all your team members to improve in key areas that might be limiting their upward career path or actually causing major conflict within a team. At times, 360 programs performed under stressful conditions with limited resources and leadership conducting the evaluation can create mistrust, anger, conflict and can leave a team with lower morale than when you started the exercise. DEC would like to assess performing the evaluation when resources are readily available and can spend the proper time managing the process to ensure the best possible outcome. Additional resources will only be available if positions noted in recommendation 2.1 are approved in the next two fiscal years. These positions will allow for proper time and attention to the evaluation process.

Recommendation 1.3

FCG DEC should facilitate the establishment of a peer support group within the DEC floor staff. The purpose of this group would be to provide a non-management outlet for DEC staff to discuss concerns and questions and to assist in coping with job related stress. The group should be comprised of trusted senior members of the DEC floor staff as well as newer members, to provide a range of perspectives. The use of a peer support group was noted as an effective resource by the Harford County PSAP in reducing workplace stress, increasing team cooperation, and reducing turnover.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

After conversations with Harford County PSAP personnel the establishment of this group has less to do with reducing stress and turnover than indicated. The original intention of the program was in fact to assist with reducing stress and allowing for an outlet for personnel. However, the program has turned more into a means for voicing frustrations. When talking to their staff directly they have much lighter workload than FC, enabling staffing to take days off as needed, to take training, and take breaks throughout the work shift. The scheduling and lighter load with Harford County PSAP personnel allows the team time for the establishment and running of the program. Unfortunately at this time FCG DEC has limited resources and management or supervisor time to put the program together and effectively run the program for positive communication. If the appropriate resources become available FCG DEC will work to put together at least small size peer groups to allow for stress outlet amongst personnel. In the meantime, FCG DEC will look at the possibility of implementing a mentoring or coaching program where personnel will be paired with a mentor or coach that can help alleviate the stresses and work upon staff development.

Recommendation 1.4

FCG DEC Management should conduct a formal team building exercise. Team building processes can include problem solving exercises or business related activities such as scenario based group discussion. This allows for reinforcement of roles and collaboration amongst the team. A successful team building process may augment social relations, assist in the development of a cohesive plan for the success of the organization, and improve unity and flexibility amongst decision makers.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

Management has recently conducted an all-day team building exercise and looks to continue in future. This exercise was conducted amongst the management team of DEC. Semi-annually the staff through manager level attend team/group meetings to go over plans and goals and every other month the supervisor to manager level attend team/group meetings to go over more day to day operational structure and plans. DEC believes that if resources become available to conduct team building exercises that small groups would be best suited for role filling and team building exercises. This will allow for better understanding and inclusion amongst the team overall. DEC will look into potential external team building exercises and cost, however, teams would need to come off the floor from work and overtime incurred in order to mandate such exercises and activities.

Observation 2

Current DEC staffing appears to be low when compared to benchmarked counties, current and historical call volumes, and projected population growth.

Observation Detail

SC&H conducted a benchmarking exercise with three comparable PSAPs (*see Appendix B*). The PSAPs benchmarked were Harford County (MD), Loudon County (VA), and Prince William County (VA). These counties were chosen for benchmarking based on similar population size and density, as well as proximity to Frederick County. The purpose of the benchmarking exercise was to compare various aspects of these organizations to the FCG DEC, including staff levels, positions held, shift structure, call volume, population, and turnover rates. The benchmarking information includes statistics between 2013 through 2015. When compared to the three counties reviewed, the following observations were noted:

- Frederick County processes the second highest average number of calls among benchmarked counties and has additional responsibilities when processing calls, including dispatching for fire, medical, and police as well as handling administrative calls (state highway, animal control, public works, etc.). The average number of calls for the counties benchmarked including 9-1-1 vs. non-9-1-1, and outgoing calls were:
 - Prince William County: 609,945 calls; 107 full time employees
 - Frederick County: 420,494 calls; 53 full time employees and 11 part-time
 - Harford County: 264,670 calls; 68 full time employees
 - Loudoun County: 239,411 calls; 38 full time employees (Fire/ EMS only)
- Prince William County and Harford County maintain a larger staff than Frederick County. Prince William County has 56 more employees than Frederick County while processing 189,451 more calls. Harford County has 17 more full time employees than Frederick County and processes 155,824 fewer calls. While it was noted that the Loudoun County Fire/ EMS DEC operates with 38 employees, the county maintains an additional 40 full time staff to cover Police related calls.
- The employee turnover rate⁵ at Frederick is higher than that of the compared counties. The average annual employee turnover percentage was 13% between 2012 and 2016. Prince William County averaged 8.5%, Loudoun County averaged 5.2%, and Harford County averaged 2.9%.

In addition to benchmarking against comparable counties, SC&H projected future staffing needs. Based upon a formula created by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO), the optimal number of Call Takers to receive and address calls within the DEC considering current 2016 call information is eight per shift. Currently, each shift at the DEC is

⁵ Employee turnover refers to the percentage of employees who leave an organization and are placed by new employees.

staffed with three Call Takers at a minimum. SC&H projected this number further for each of the next five years, through 2040, using the projected population amounts provided by the Frederick County Government website. As a result, the optimal number of Call Takers is projected to rise to nine by 2025 and 10 by 2035.

Further, during the Planning and Risk Assessment Phase of this engagement, SC&H found that according to APCO, the industry standard and the primary objective for an emergency call center is that 90% of 9-1-1 calls should be answered within 10 seconds. At the DEC, between 2013 and 2015, 97.31% of 9-1-1 calls were answered within 10 seconds. In 2015, 98.24% of 9-1-1 calls were answered within 10 seconds. Based on the data, the DEC is performing above the industry compliance rate. As a result, it appears that the additional resources can be focused to address dispatching bottlenecks. Also during the planning phase of this review, SC&H spent a day observing DEC floor operations. It was noted that both the Police and Fire/EMS dispatch teams were consistently addressing calls throughout the day. At times, all dispatchers were occupied with addressing calls, indicating the frequency with which the DEC dispatch teams reach response capacity. As a result, Supervisors may be required to suspend their primary oversight and support responsibilities to assist with the dispatching and processing of calls. This can result in greater stress due to a more hectic call center environment.

Risk

An understaffed PSAP may result in the reduced ability to receive and address emergency calls in a timely manner. Additionally, staff may be required to work more hours, or may be unable to use time off in order to ensure adequate coverage. This may result in workplace burnout, reducing public safety, and increasing turnover.

Recommendation 2.1

FCG DEC should increase staffing to sufficiently accommodate the organization's responsibilities and workload and keep pace with anticipated population growth. Management should focus on allocating those resources to best fit the department needs (e.g. dispatchers with Police and Fire/EMS) without compromising the ability to comply and perform above the APCO standard for timeliness of receiving calls. Prior to hiring additional staff, the DEC should ensure adequate workstations are available to accommodate the additional employees.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

FCG DEC will request in the FY18 budget 24 call-taking staff, 4 of which would be for leave impact in a 24/7 minimum staffing level environment, 16 call-takers for shift work and 4 additional managers. The additional supervisor/manager positions will be added to keep the span of control at a manageable level and allow for on hand resources for training, development and peer groups as addressed in this report.

Observation 3

A process is not in place to monitor the volume of emergency calls received through non-emergency phone lines.

Observation Detail

In calendar year 2013, the DEC conducted a total of 412,764 incoming and outgoing calls. Call volume decreased to 408,326 during 2014 and increased to 440,391 calls in 2015. Over the three year period, 35% of calls were received via the 9-1-1 emergency lines, 48% were received via the non-emergency lines, and 16% were outgoing calls from the DEC. On occasion, calls are received to report an emergency via the non-emergency lines. In order to ensure all emergency calls are appropriately received and dispatched, Call Takers with emergency call training receive incoming calls for both 9-1-1 and business lines. Current system limitations do not allow DEC management to monitor the volume of emergency calls received through non-emergency phone lines.

Through various conversations with independent parties, SC&H noted that all Call Takers are not always responsible for performing emergency protocol questions in addition to receiving calls. These Call Takers transfer the emergency call to the appropriate emergency Call Taker who receives the call and transfers to dispatch. These counties did not note specific challenges or delays related to call response time based on the transferring of emergency calls.

Risk

The DEC is unable to determine the prevalence of emergency calls received via non-emergency lines, while nearly 50% of all calls received on these lines. As a result, the DEC may be training and staffing a greater number of emergency Call Takers than necessary, resulting in increased personnel costs and greater preparation time to onboard additional staff.

Recommendation 3.1

FCG DEC Management should implement a process to track and monitor the volume of calls that are received through non-emergency lines that require emergency resources. Using this information, the DEC can re-evaluate the need for trained emergency Call Takers to receive business line calls. FCG DEC Management should review the results after an appropriate amount of time (as determined by management). Based upon the results of the monitoring procedures, FCG DEC Management should consider creating or adding positions for dedicated administrative non-certified Call Takers if appropriate. Should administrative Call Takers be incorporated in the staffing plan, DEC Management should ensure a process is in place to

transfer any emergency calls received through administrative lines to certified Call Takers. This may reduce upfront training time and costs for new hires, add an additional layer for promotion and growth, and alleviate administrative call duties from emergency Call Takers. This structure may reduce stress levels of certified Call Takers and allow their focus to be strictly on emergency related calls.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

The DEC sees no value to changing the call taking process for non-emergency calls. Before the DEC required the use of the IAED protocols on ALL calls, much of the information gathered by call-takers was unclear, incomplete, or distorted. IAED protocols provides the capability to focus clearly on each situation, eliminating inconsistency and vagueness through its standard, precise approach to each call, emergency or non-emergency.

DEC management has learned from the failures of our communication centers that not using a protocol on every call can result in improper response prioritizing. Response prioritization is the most fundamental concept of protocols. To handle calls correctly, the DEC and our call-takers must be reproducibly, and closely, using the protocol in order to safely match pre-determine response modes to caller situations. Simplistically, sending the right thing, to the right person, at the right time, in the right way, and doing the right thing for the caller until help arrives.

DEC has found that training all new personnel in the use of the protocols allows the trainers to train easy those who have no background in public safety to quickly and accurately handle both emergency and non-emergency calls. The idea of transferring callers from a non-emergency line to an emergency line has shown to add undo stress to the caller, and also requires the non-emergency call-taker to be able to accurately identify the emergency call needs and when to transfer.

DEC management believes to practice incomplete protocol use (use only on emergency calls) is risking the consequences of poor call taking at a time when a much more informed and demanding public has grown to expect services that often demonstrated to them graphically and convincingly on primetime television. Also, full training of call-takers to protocol allows for more expedient development to the dispatcher level which is of high need especially as noted in this report at the sheriff's office dispatch area. Training all call takers to protocol allows for a larger pool of personnel candidates able to promote and develop as needed.

DEC will continue to look at efficient means of collecting and tracking non-emergency calls. As supervisor and manager role resources are increased the ability to analyze and track these types of calls will be much more readily available and real-time.

Observation 4

A process is not in place to provide formal training to current and future DEC Supervisors. Furthermore, the DEC is not staffed to provide equal, timely training opportunities to all DEC staff deemed ready for promotion.

Observation Detail

The progression in DEC floor staff positions is as follows: ECS I, ECS II, ECS III, ECS IV, ECS Supervisor, and then ECS Manager. Supervisors are individuals selected to represent management to ensure employees are directed in accordance with established policies and practices communicated by upper management.

Through the performance of the JSS conducted of DEC floor staff (*see Appendix A*), SC&H noted various responses pertaining to training opportunities. SC&H discussed the responses with the Director of the DEC who provided further context regarding the lack of available staff to provide training to qualified employees, specifically:

- While employees who are offered Supervisor positions are deemed to have the technical skills for the role, a process is not in place to provide formal training to prospective and current supervisors. Employees are promoted from an ECS IV role to Supervisor without any additional training. Management promotes employees after testing/vetting, performance, training received, SOP knowledge, HR rules knowledge, and evaluations.
- DEC staff that are willing and deemed ready for additional responsibilities are not provided equal opportunities for timely training. Per discussion with DEC Leadership, this is due to a shortage of training staff. Due to the limited training resources, Management selects the employee they feel is best equipped for training.

Risk

DEC Supervisors may not be adequately trained resulting in unprepared leadership, reduced communication effectiveness, increased employee turnover, and non-motivated staff.

Employees who are not provided training opportunities at the ECS levels are not able to move up within their career paths at DEC. Additionally, the current structure of management selecting particular employees for training based on a non-formalized definition of individual performance can be perceived as favoritism. These two factors may result in reduced employee morale and increased turnover.

Recommendation 4.1

FCG DEC Management should implement a formal training program for current and future Supervisors. Training provided at the inception of a Supervisor's career is preferred for

increasing success within the position. Formal training in interpersonal and technical skills may increase the productivity of floor staff.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

While DEC management recognizes the need to develop and implement a formal training program, as stated in the observations, we are currently understaffed on the operations floor, and the Quality Assurance, Training officer, and Public Information Act records compliance roles are consolidated in one position. Due the existing mandated workload it may be a considerable time before a formal training plan can be developed and implemented without affecting mandated responsibilities.

Management's goal is to continue to provide staff with the ability to attend outside classes for interpersonal skills, leadership, and management, subject to budget and staffing limitations. The DEC promotes advancing the knowledge of non-supervisory staff by requiring the supervisors and administrators to regularly train those interested in advancing their skills, when time and staffing allows. A full time management level training position will ultimately allow for the development of programs and structure to bring up personnel through the system to promotion.

Recommendation 4.2

FCG DEC Management should ensure all employees who are seeking and deemed ready for additional responsibilities are offered equal opportunity for timely training. This may be accomplished through the addition of an employee tasked with ECS promotion training. Additionally, standards of performance and service required to receive additional, promotion related training should be established and documented. This may aid the DEC in identifying employees who are ready for additional training and reduce the perception of favoritism through established expectations. The further employees are able to progress at the DEC, the more flexible and capable shift coverage and staffing will become. Additionally, this demonstrates the DEC's commitment to promoting employee career growth.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

This recommendation is fully embraced by DEC management. We very much recognize having all employees trained to the ECS3 level makes for a more flexible and capable workforce, reducing stress and making shift coverage easier, which may reduce the need for overtime. The DEC plan on requesting the additional staff in the FY18 budget to accommodate the needs of training along with adding a management level training position to oversee training structure and personnel development.

Observation 5

DEC compensation and benefits do not appear to be comparably structured with similarly benchmarked counties.

Observation Detail

According to the JSS, compensation and benefits are two of the facets in determining job satisfaction levels. Offering competitive salary combined with benefits is a method of improving employee morale, increasing a feeling of job security, improving job satisfaction, and reducing the rate of turnover. Annually, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) conducts a survey of United States employees to identify factors that influence overall employee satisfaction and engagement in the workplace. In recent years, benefits, compensation, and job security have been amongst the top five contributors to employee job satisfaction.

Through discussions with DEC Management and the responses received through the employee survey, SC&H noted the following:

- DEC employees are asked to take on additional responsibilities (training, quality assurance, database management) outside the scope of their job role without compensation incentives.
- DEC floor staff with several years of experience may be compensated less than new hires due to historical salary increase freezes and salary rate changes.
- DEC staff are categorized as clerical employees with a 30 year service term for retirement while uniformed employees are on a 22 year service schedule given the front line nature of their work.
- An independent vision plan is not included in DEC benefits. Vision coverage is limited and included in the current medical plan which provides coverage for an eye exam every two years. The nature of work involves viewing multiple computer screens for in 12 hour increments for four consecutive days.

The JSS further supports the above mentioned compensation related findings:

- The DEC department has a widely divided workforce in the satisfaction level of the Benefits facet. **(See Appendix A, Tables 11-14)**
- 39% of DEC staff is unsatisfied with pay, and 33% are unsatisfied with fringe benefits. **(See Appendix A, Table 15)**

Risk

A compensation plan perceived as unsatisfactory may reduce employee satisfaction, loyalty, and retention.

Recommendation 5.1

FCG DEC should work with HR to perform an analysis to determine if providing or offering additional benefits such as an independent vision plan is feasible.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

After reviewing the County benefits for 2017, vision coverage has been added and will meet the needs of this recommendation.

Recommendation 5.2

FCG DEC should inquire with HR in regards to performing a detailed assessment to determine whether DEC employees can be classified as uniformed employees rather than clerical, reducing the years of service to retirement from 30 years to 22 years. Reducing the years of service may increase employee retention by adding an incentive to remain within the department. Additionally, members of the DEC identify with emergency services personnel due to the nature of their shift schedules and critical role in the emergency response process. Reclassifying these employees as uniformed staff may increase overall morale and retention of veteran employees.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

DEC management will request consideration from HR with regards to being reclassified as uniformed employees and be included in the uniformed retirement system, though these types of requests have been turned down previously. This is a topic of great concern nationally as treating 911 emergency personnel as uniformed. DEC will continue to track national and local trends. The cost of such reclassification could be great to the county which would out measure the benefit of making the classification change in the first place.

Recommendation 5.3

FCG DEC should consider adding a bonus or compensation based incentive for employees who take on additional responsibilities outside their job role (e.g. training, quality assurance, database management, etc.). In the event that additional financial compensation is not feasible, FCG DEC should consider alternative incentives such as occasionally providing breakfast or lunch, employee of the month awards, and recognition. Such actions may also assist with improving some of the conditions noted in Observation 1. This may encourage current employees to take more active roles within the DEC, while working to enhance employee engagement and the skillset of the team overall.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

DEC made this request in the FY17 budget and it was denied. Will make the same requests in FY18. DEC also recognizes that there are other low cost measure to build employee morale and adding incentive. Items such as regular awards for personnel or staff lunch or dinners on a quarterly basis could build morale at a lower cost to the County. DEC will look at these types of incentives against the budget.

Recommendation 5.4

FCG DEC should work with HR to review employee compensation compared to years of service to ensure newer (in terms of years of service) employees are not compensated more than senior employees. This will demonstrate to senior employees that the County values their continued years of service and reduce the incentive to move to another county's PSAP in order to obtain a raise.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

After a review of staff compensation, this does not appear to be a current problem. We did have this issue several years ago, and it was resolved through the court system. DEC will keep reviewing employee promotions and high level new hires in the future to ensure consistency remains intact amongst the promotional and organizational structure.

Recommendation 5.5

FCG DEC Management should consider implementing a formalized break schedule policy for when shift staffing level allows. Furthermore, once additional staffing is obtained, implementing a permanent break structure should be considered (e.g. two 15 minute breaks and a full lunch break). This will allow DEC employees an opportunity to rest physically (e.g. eyes) and mentally de-stress.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

DEC will review the ability to allow for breaks across the shift schedules once more staffing resources are provided. 15 minute breaks and/or a half hour lunch break built into the shift would be ideal for employee incentive and mental de-stress.

Observation 6

Quality assurance scoring and assessment practices are not consistent among all reviewers.

Observation Detail

Quality assurance reviews are conducted at the DEC with the intention of improving quality of service, ensuring the DEC is providing the community with the best and safest experience, and certifying compliance with Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) EMS, EFD, and EPD protocols for receiving and responding to calls. Monthly, the Administrator of Quality Assurance and Training and other authorized personnel reviewed a sample of EMS, Fire, and Police calls for each floor staff. An Individual Compliance Report is completed and given to each employee. Any errors are noted and non-compliance is discussed with the employee.

The JSS conducted of DEC line level staff offered an opportunity for DEC employees to provide written feedback in an open comment format (*See Appendix A, Qualitative section*). Upon a detailed review of the comments received, there was consistent feedback to support that DEC employees feel Management and quality assurance expectations are inconsistent and unclear. Per discussion with DEC Leadership, this perception likely arises from inconsistent scoring procedures. Supervisors may notice an error and verbally communicate it to the staff without officially documenting it (e.g. one supervisor may let one or more “inconsequential” errors go undocumented, while another may explicitly note each occurrence.).

Risk

Inconsistent standards and feedback may result in confused and frustrated staff, resulting in performance fear, a tense work environment, and eventual turnover.

Recommendation 6.1

FCG DEC Management should consider implementing a process to periodically review and assess the consistency, completeness, and accuracy of quality assurance reviews. This review should specifically ensure all feedback is documented. If deficiencies in following protocol are found, they should be consistently noted and represented in the scoring. A process should be in place to train reviewers and supervisors regarding grading expectation and record keeping, ensuring consistency of application.

Management’s Action Plan and Implementation Date

The Emergency Dispatch Quality Improvement specialist (ED-Q) primary purpose is to objectively measure calltaker performance through random case review in a consistent manner. This purpose is achieved by adhering to a standardized procedure which the International Academy of Emergency Dispatch (IAED) provides with their performance Standards and scoring. The data collated during this process becomes the foundation of the

quality management program, accurate case review data, generated monthly, provides a clear picture of the communications center's overall compliance to protocol and is the most useful measurement of quality customer care in the communications center.

The Frederick County Department of Emergency Communications Center (DEC) will establish a Quality Improvement Unit (QIU). All of the DEC ED-Qs will collectively comprise the unit. The QIU will be led by the Administrator of QA/ Training. The QIU shall meet bi-monthly to review ED-Q policies, review difficult calls, and clarify gray areas of the IAED protocols such as but, not limited to Third-Party callers, multiple attempts, and QA review consistency.

Point of clarification:

The Administrator of QA/Training currently is responsible for the QA review of 5% of all EMD calls (COMAR) and 3% of Fire calls, as well as 3% of Police calls received each month for a total of 475 required reviewed calls per month, or 118 hours per month, or 1475 hours per year. The Administrator is also responsible for all Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Last year there was 1200 FOIA requests totaling 900 man-hours to complete, two training academies for new hires totaling 640 hours. This included 1475 hours QA, 900 hours FOIA, and 640 hours Training Academies resulting in 2965 total hours to complete tasks. The normal employee works approximately 1790 hours for the County. To manage the workload I currently have a part time employee working full time hours to assist and full time employees work approximately 20 hours per week.

I will be requesting two additional staff in the FY18 budget to manage the workload to be able to add the additional work required to lead a QIU.

Observation 7

A formalized process is not in place for DEC leadership to communicate policy changes, address employee concerns, and seek employee input.

Observation Detail

Through the performance of the JSS of DEC line level staff (*See Appendix A, Qualitative section*), SC&H noted consistent feedback supporting that DEC employees feel there is insufficient communication between DEC floor staff and upper management. SC&H inquired with the Director regarding these responses, who noted that team meetings are not generally held, as past attempts have been minimally attended as the meeting time is unpaid and optional. The following sentiments were noted within the survey:

- Department meetings are not currently held at the DEC to include all employees
- The DEC department has a widely divided workforce in the satisfaction level of the Communication facet (*See Appendix A, Tables 11-14*)
- Employees feel that decisions are made without employee input or buy-in
- Employees feel that policy changes are not effectively communicated
- Employees feel that management has inconsistent expectations

Risk

Ineffective communication may result in low morale, divided staff, confusion, and employee turnover.

Recommendation 7.1

FCG DEC Management should consider implementing a plan to schedule and hold periodic mandatory department meetings to discuss department news, training topics, potential policy changes, announce employee recognition, department successes, obtain employee input and feedback, etc. In order to improve attendance, Management should consider holding the meetings each shift during low call volume time. An agenda should be established and minutes should be recorded to be communicated to the team and available for reference, in order to maintain a consistent message across all shifts. This may help to foster greater cooperation and satisfaction within the DEC through increased interaction with management in a positive, forward looking setting.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

Emergency Communications will hold shift meetings every 3 months. Dates will be chosen that allow two shifts to be covered in one day. Example: A shift reports at 18:00 hours, they would report to work for the meeting at 17:00 hours; B shift ends at 18:00, they would stay until 19:00 hours for the meeting. All hours would be compensated.

Recommendation 7.2

FCG DEC Management should consider monthly video communication of departmental updates as an alternative, or in addition, to in-person meetings. These videos can communicate policy changes and important information to the team that can be viewed as they have availability. Employees should be given the opportunity to submit questions and comments that can be addressed by management during this communication.

Management's Action Plan and Implementation Date

Management will hold off starting monthly video communications until the effect of 7.1 can be evaluated.